

# Phil 170 Problems in Social Thought

## Syllabus Fall 2021

Credits: 4 | Gen Ed: SB | Prerequisites: None

### Instructor

Tim Juvshik  
South College E416  
[tjuvshik@umass.edu](mailto:tjuvshik@umass.edu)

Time: MWF 11:15-12:05  
Room: South College E470  
Office Hours: W 1:00-2:00

### Course Description

This course serves as an introduction to social and political philosophy. We will consider a gamut of issues related to how society should be structured, the nature of political authority and justice, and how certain social and institutional structures contribute to various social inequities. More specifically, we will consider the following sorts of questions: What kinds of societies are ideal for human beings? What is the role of government in those societies? Given that serious moral transgressions have affected how most contemporary societies are arranged, how should we characterize and respond to injustice and oppression in our non-ideal world? What role does the social pursuit of knowledge play in sustaining racist, sexist, or homophobic norms and institutions and what role can it play in overturning them? What obligations do we have towards global citizens who aren't members of our immediate culture, community or country? Readings will include a combination of classic and contemporary texts in social and political philosophy. No prior philosophical experience is required.

### Course Goals and Learning Objectives

This course is an introduction to social and political philosophy and will cover an array of topics of social and political importance from a philosophical perspective. As a result, students will become familiar with many of the core topics of this subdiscipline. Additionally, by the end of the course students will be able to:

- Identify, properly interpret, and evaluate the philosophical views and arguments of a variety of philosophers and writers on the topics of the course.
- Engage in reflective and respectful discussion with your peers, especially in situations in which you may disagree.
- Reflect meaningfully on the relevance of what we've read and discussed for living a flourishing life in a healthy and just socio-political context.
- Develop your own answers to the questions we discuss, as well as develop an increased ability to communicate them and argue for them by oral and written means.
- Think more clearly about challenging moral, political and scientific issues.
- Be clearer about your own beliefs and where they come from.
- Evaluate your own position or conclusions through critical reflective thinking.

With the importance of the issues covered, in particular the pressing social, political, and moral problems facing our society, the focus on critical analysis and diverse perspectival thinking, and the stress on clear written and verbal communication, this course meets the goals of the General Education Social and Behavioural Sciences designation. As a 4-credit course, the expected amount of work outside of classroom time by university standards is 8-12 hours per week (which includes reading, taking notes, preparing for class, and working on assignments).

## Readings

There are no required textbooks for this course. All required readings will be posted to the course Moodle page as PDFs and if you have access to a printer you can print them out. Other required course materials, such as videos or podcasts or YouTube clips, will likewise be available on the course Moodle page.

## Grading

Letter grades (corresponding to a 4-point scale: A=4, A-=3.7, B+=3.3, etc.) will be based on the following:

SNTs	20%
Short Paper	20%
Journal Entries (x4)	20%
Final Project	25%
Attendance/Participation	15%

The following percentage to letter grade conversion chart will be used:

A=93-100%	A-=90-92.99%	B+=87-89.99%
B=83-86.99%	B-=80-82.99%	C+=77-79.99%
C=73-76.99%	C-=70-72.99%	D+=67-69.99%
D=60-66.99%	F=0-59.99%	

## Assignments

### *Socratic Note Taking (SNT):*

The purpose of these assignments is to help you read articles more effectively, and to provide accountability for completing the readings. “Socratic Note Taking” is named after the philosopher Socrates, who famously taught by asking questions. In these notes, you will write questions as you read. Think of it as a reading quiz that you create yourself, along with an answer key. A set of notes is due for each reading. Students will be required to produce three questions and answers per reading. Collectively, these are worth 20% of your grade and they will be graded out of 3 points (0.5 for each question and answer). The lowest two SNT grades will be dropped. They are due by the start of the class in which we are discussing the relevant reading. Complete and submit your questions/answers on Moodle. I will provide sample questions/answers at the beginning of term.

### *Short Paper*

Students will write a short (2-3 page), ‘compare and contrast’ paper, due mid-semester and worth 20% of the final grade. This assignment will involve comparing and contrasting the views of two philosophers we read in the first part of the semester. I will suggest appropriate author pairings. Papers should follow the standard compare/contrast structure: thesis statement identifying the two things being compared/contrasted, and then comparison/contrast either consecutively by author or concurrently by individual point. The purpose is to illuminate subtle similarities and differences in key assumptions that aren’t obvious to the reader about two different perspectives on how society should be structured, thereby facilitating a critical evaluation of the course content through comparison of different points of view.

### *Journal Entries*

Students will complete four journal entries throughout the semester, one for each unit we cover. Collectively, these are worth 20% (5% each) of the final grade and each entry will be about a page or two in length (300-500 words). The purpose of these journal entries is to get you to reflect on the readings and draw connections between the topics/ideas discussed and other aspects of your lives. This could be with other courses you're taking or have taken, work, family or university life or issues you've read about in the news. These entries will allow you to apply some of the more theoretical concepts and topics to more every day issues that arise in your personal lives. Journal entries will be submitted on Moodle.

### *Final Project*

There is a final term project worth 25% of your grade. This project has multiple components that aim to bring together the various skills you have practiced in the course (reading comprehension, abstract thinking, drawing connections, expressing complex ideas, applying theoretical concepts to concrete cases, critical reflective thinking, etc.). It will focus on one or more of the authors/topics we covered in this course and you will reflect on the author's views, your own views of the topic before and after taking this course, assess the relevance of those views for current social/political issues, and show how they could make the world more just and equitable through concrete application of the author's ideas or how the author's views need to be amended to lead to a more just society. Crucially, the medium of this project is up to you: students may write a standard term paper, record a presentation, express the ideas through a short story, film or rap song, or even make a diorama, newscast or interpretive dance. There will be in-class workshops to brainstorm and plan these projects and students must get their final ideas approved by me. This project is an opportunity to explore pressing social/political issues in creative ways. More details will be provided later in the term.

### *Attendance and Participation*

There is an attendance and participation grade, worth 15% of your final grade with both attendance and participation worth half of that. Your showing up and being attentive and engaged in lecture will be reflected in your attendance and participation grade. Attending class is required to get full marks. You have two 'freebie' absences which don't need to be justified. Regularly participating by asking questions, making comments and otherwise engaging with me and your peers will count towards your participation marks. You may lose marks if you are disruptive in lecture (on your phone, talking out of turn, regularly arriving late, etc.). Students may gain participation marks by coming to office hours.

*Please note:* do *not* come to class if you have any Covid-19-like symptoms or have tested positive or if someone close to you has tested positive. This will *not* affect your attendance grade and we can find ways to make sure you are caught up on coursework. Given the uncertainty of the pandemic I'm committed to being flexible as the need arises. As per HIPAA requirements, any personal medical information you relay to me will be kept confidential.

### **Class Expectations**

- **Course Readings:** Students should do all the assigned readings *before* the class in which they're discussed as this is necessary for both good class discussion and to do the SNTs.
- **Attendance and Participation:** Attendance in class is expected. I will take attendance and keep track of student contributions in class. You can miss up to 2 classes without penalty and

without notifying me. Any further absences will need to be justified. This contributes to your final grade as described above.

- **Electronics Policy:** Laptops, tablets, and phones are not permitted during class unless needed for in-class work. Using electronics is distracting to both yourself and others, and studies have shown that it lowers grades of the user and those around them. If you require a special accommodation regarding electronics please come see me to request an exemption.
- **Late Work Policy:** Late assignments without an extension will be downgraded by 1/3 of a letter grade per day after the due date, up to a penalty of 2 full letter grades (after which they won't be accepted). Consult with me to request an extension. Late SNTs will get a zero except in special circumstances, which must be justified ahead of time.
- **Classroom Etiquette:** Students are expected to respect each other, allow others the chance to speak, and be open-minded to views different from their own. The topics covered may be controversial and evoke strong reactions. Please be aware of, and sensitive to, the feelings and experiences of others. Any disrespectful or inappropriate behaviour towards myself or your peers will not be tolerated and may result in disciplinary action. As part of this, *arrive on time and do not pack up early* – it is very distracting to myself and others.
- **Syllabus:** Readings and schedule are subject to change. Any changes will be announced in class and on the course Moodle page.
- **Extra Credit:** As a matter of principle, I do not offer extra credit assignments.

### **Academic Honesty**

Students should not plagiarize their work. I will follow UMass official policies when handling cases of academic dishonesty. After meeting with me, a student who has plagiarized can choose between two options. The formal option involves a hearing before the Academic Dishonesty Board. The informal option involves agreeing to the instructor's terms and signing a document to that effect. This informal resolution is filed with the Academic Dishonesty Board. Should a student have three filed informal resolutions, official disciplinary action will be taken. Consult UMass' website for further information: <https://www.umass.edu/honesty/>.

### **Accessibility**

I am committed to making this class accessible and welcoming for all students. Students with documented disabilities are encouraged to contact Disability Services in 161 Whitmore, or at <http://www.umass.edu/disability> to register and request any accommodations you might need. If you anticipate receiving accommodations from Disability Services, but are still waiting on paperwork, please tell me as soon as possible so that we can put necessary accommodations in place.

**Provisional Course Schedule**

Date	Topic	Readings	Work Due
<u>Week 1</u> W 09/01 F 09/03	Intro and Arguments	No Readings	
<u>Week 2</u> W 09/08 F 09/10	Government, Society, Justice	Plato, <i>Republic</i> (selections)	SNT x1 Add/Drop 09/08
<u>Week 3</u> M 09/13 W 09/15 F 09/17	Government, Society, Justice	Hobbes, <i>Leviathan</i> (selections)  Rousseau, <i>On the Social Contract</i> (selections)	SNT x2
<u>Week 4</u> M 09/20 W 09/22 F 09/24	Government, Society, Justice	Wolff, "Rawls' Theory of Justice"  Brennan, "The Right to a Competent Electorate"	SNT x2
<u>Week 5</u> M 09/27 W 09/29 F 10/01	Government, Society, Justice	Wolf, "Morality and Partiality"  Singer, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality"	SNT x2
<u>Week 6</u> M 10/04 W 10/06 F 10/08	Science and Knowledge Production	Fricker, <i>Epistemic Injustice</i> (selections)	SNT x1 Journal Entry 1
<u>Week 7</u> W 10/13 F 10/15	Science and Knowledge Production	Nguyen, "Escape the Echo Chamber"	SNT x1

<u>Week 8</u> M 10/18 W 10/20 F 10/22	Science and Knowledge Production	Valian, <i>Why So Slow?</i> (selections)  Saul, "Feminism, Science, and Bias"	SNT x2  Short Paper Due
<u>Week 9</u> M 10/25 W 10/27 F 10/29	Ethics and Culture	Moody-Adams, "Culture, Responsibility, and Affected Ignorance"	SNT x1  Journal Entry 2
<u>Week 10</u> M 11/01 W 11/03 F 11/05	Ethics and Culture	Shelby, "Justice, Deviance, and the Dark Ghetto"	SNT x1
<u>Week 11</u> M 11/08 W 11/10 F 11/12	Ethics and Culture	Nguyen & Strohl, "Cultural Appropriation and the Intimacy of Groups"  Nguyen, "Monuments as Commitments: How Art Speaks to Groups and How Groups Think in Art"	SNT x2
<u>Week 12</u> M 11/15 W 11/17 F 11/19	Social Issues: The LGBTQ+ Community	Allison, "A Question of Class"  Dembroff, "Why Be Nonbinary?"	SNT x2  Journal Entry 3
<u>Week 13</u> M 11/22	Final Project Workshop	No Readings	In-class final project brainstorm + planning session (bring your laptops)
<u>Week 14</u> M 11/29 W 12/01 F 12/03	Social Issues: Sexism and Sexuality	Pineau, "Date Rape: A Feminist Analysis"	SNT x2*  <i>*No SNT for the Roupenian</i>

		Roupenian, "Cat Person"  Jenkins and Ichikawa, "On Being the Only Ones"	
<u>Week 15</u>  M 12/06 W 12/08	Social Issues: Oppression and the Environment	Plumwood, "Paths Beyond Human-Centeredness: Lessons from Liberation Struggles"	SNT x1
<u>Week 16</u>  Exam Period	N/A	N/A	Journal Entry 4  Final Projects Due Date TBD